



MIXING WORK AND PLAY - Jonathan Willcocks has turned a lifelong passion for adventure and the outdoors into his own business Pinnacle Pursuits Inc., which offers team building and experiential learning programs for adults and youth. He was recently named in Business in Vancouver's annual Forty Under 40 awards. *Daniel Pi photo*

A worthy pursuit

After a troubled youth, a North Van man turned the pursuit of adventure into a booming leadership and team-building business.

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Jonathan Willcocks likes nothing more than to be harnessed up and standing on the knife-edge summit of some mountain far, far away from civilization.

But lately, he's been having a pretty good time sitting in his Vancouver office too.

At 36, the founder of Pinnacle Pursuits Inc. was recently named to *Business in Vancouver's* Forty Under 40 list, signifying his success as an entrepreneur running a company that offers adventure and action-based leadership and team-building programs around the world.

Of late, some major companies have come knocking at his door, including PepsiCo – the parent company of Pepsi, Frito Lay, Tropicana, Quaker Oats and Gatorade – and the Young Presidents' Organization. Add to that a schedule with clients booked up past the 2010 Winter Olympics, and it's clear Willcocks is enjoying an exciting time in his life.

It's also a long way from his troubled youth growing up with his grandparents in Victoria.

Paying room and board by the time he was in Grade 9, that's where Willcocks admits his life turned around.

"As I look back, that was what my grandfather was – he was a strict, Irish fellow," Willcocks said, sitting at the kitchen table in his North Vancouver home.

That discipline and responsibility helped him grow up fast, Willcocks reflected.

The entrepreneurial skills needed to scrounge up money to pay for a room back then also contributed to the success he's enjoying today.

But it was his father who helped him discover his true passion.

During the summer before going to Grade 10, Willcocks visited his dad in England but instead of the typical family get together, he was given an old backpack and a pair of boots and whisked away into the Scottish wilderness on an Outward Bound program his father was leading.

"I think it was an experience like that, that I realized those experiences defined who I was becoming," Willcocks said. "It was a feeling of blazing through climate and physical challeng-

es and looking back and saying, literally, 'holy smokes.'"

From that experience, Willcocks delved into a career as a guide and spent seven years as a boot-camp instructor for young offenders at Porteau Camp where he helped reshape lives gone astray.

Although Willcocks felt he connected with the youth at the camp because of his own troubled past, after seven years he wanted something more.

"I realized in 1997 ... I don't want to be doing push ups for the rest of my life or running up mountains for consequences," he said.

Instead, Willcocks wanted to share extreme outdoor adventures and learning experiences with a wider – and willing – audience. So he started Pinnacle Pursuits.

"I had spent seven years with young offenders in the Sea-to-Sky corridor so I could have taken anyone else out with the right gear."

He literally started the business out of his truck, planning and guiding trips for recreation centres and youth programs. The trips were a hit as they were exciting and also left lasting impressions on the participants, instilling leadership skills and building team dynamics.

Since then, with the help of his wife, Pinnacle has grown into a Vancouver office with a full-time staff that fluctuates between nine and 16 during the busy summer season. Willcocks continues to hold local programs and seminars, but has also travelled to locales in Scotland, Thailand and Alaska, to name but a few.

Although his company's growth has forced Willcocks to tone down the adventure guiding – "some trips became too extreme for the normal-minded people," he admitted – the lessons from his programs haven't changed. He continues to believe in learning through action and pursuing new experiences.

Business in Vancouver's Forty Under 40 was announced earlier this month and other North Shore names include Amar Doman (Futura Corp.), Chad Wasilenkoff (Fortress Paper Ltd. and Fortress Capital Markets Group Ltd.), Alan Oishi (Colliers International), and Michael Kennedy (Stantec Consulting).

For more information on Willcocks and Pinnacle Pursuits, visit them online at www.pinnaclepursuits.com.

Sweet Valentine's Sundaes.

Open Sundaes Sweet-Inspired Bath and Body Products has put together special Valentine's Day pre-packaged gifts to make your Feb. 14 that much sweeter. The Happy Valentine's Day Sweetheart Cupcake Bubble Bomb (\$9.95) comes in cotton candy, vanilla sundae or raspberry sorbet and is individually wrapped in a satin-ribboned gift box.

The Sweetheart Soak and Melt Bath Dessert is a strawberry shortcake flavour enhanced with cocoa butter and grape seed oil to make a total skin conditioner (\$7.95). The Be Mine Lip Topping Gift Pack contains three dessert flavours – raspberry, vanilla sundae and cotton candy – of lip gloss (\$26.95).

Open Sundaes has stores in Vancouver at 1056 Mainland in Yaletown and 3742 West 10th in Kitsilano. Products can also be found at The Bay in Park Royal Mall.